

Gc
977.701
J31wr
no.1
1997192

REYNOLDS HISTORICAL
GENEALOGY COLLECTION

ALLEN COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY



3 1833 01077 4013

Writers' Program, Iowa

HISTORICAL
JASPER
COUNTY *Iowa*

THE FIRST WHITE MEN IN JASPER COUNTY

SPONSORED by

JASPER COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

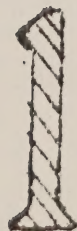
PREPARED by

IOWA WRITERS PROGRAM

WORK PROJECTS ADMINISTRATION

Iowa
977.760

J39h



29

*F
627
J3W7
H01

Federal Works Agency

John M. Carney, Administrator

1997192

*F ✓

627

J3W7

Writers' program. Iowa.

Historical Jasper County. Sponsored by
Jasper County Historical Society. Prepared
by Iowa Writers' Program, Works Progress
Administration. n.p., 1940.

62040 no. 1

no. 28 cm.

Mimeographed.

Contents - no. 1. The first white men
in Jasper County.

Rec'd May 8-1978

* F

627

J3W7

110.1

Federal Works Agency

John M. Carmody, Administrator

Work Projects Administration

F. C. Harrington, Commissioner

Florence Kerr, Assistant Commissioner

A. E. Michel, Acting State Administrator

Professional & Service Division

Helen Cresswell, State Director

HISTORICAL JASPER COUNTY

Number I

THE FIRST WHITE MAN IN JASPER COUNTY

The first white men known to have reached Jasper County belonged to Companies B, H and I of the United States Dragoons. Commanded by Lt. Albert M. Lea, chronicler and topographer of the expedition, they had set out from Fort Des Moines No. 1 at Montrose to explore the region between the Des Moines and Skunk rivers, and beyond. Twelve days later they made camp at a place named for Charles W. Gaston of Company I, and Lea wrote in the official journal: "19 Made 25 miles. Encamped at Camp Gaston. Plenty of Game." Historians have speculated that the site must have been approximately in Section 32, Washington Township. Lea's map, published in 1836, shows the direction of the march to have been north-northwest, probably from the center of the southern boundary of Des Moines Township to a point near Washington Township. It was Lea's book, Notes on the Wisconsin Territory: Particularly with Reference to the Iowa District or Black Hawk Purchase, that caught public attention and popularized the name Iowa. This book, describing the expedition, was published in Philadelphia in 1836. The name Iowa, derived from a tribe of Indians, the Ayuouez (as the French phonetically interpreted the sound), had previously been used only to designate a local river.

The region was thickly peopled with Indians. Poweshiek, the noted Fox chief, had one of his principal villages on Indian Creek and a smaller one a mile west of the site that was later to become Newton. A string of camps beginning in Palo Alto Township maintained signal connections along the Skunk River. Years after the Indian evacuation, the remains of No. 1 camp in Section 19 could be seen -- a crater-like depression held in place in a rim of sand hills by a circle of cottonwoods. From this point a signal fire could warn 20 villages down the river by the relay system. Long afterward, pottery, knives, flints, hatchets, and arrowheads were found along the hills and in the Skunk River bottoms. A large village once occupied a site near Kellogg. Two elliptical earth mounds about 50 feet long discovered near the old North Skunk River channel were believed to have been built up as floors of long Indian dwellings.

On a farm near Colfax, a large brown rock, estimated to weigh four or five tons, was discovered to be covered with strange hieroglyphics never identified but considered by some persons to be older than the Indians, and perhaps even older than the mound builders. It was thought to have been used for signalling or perhaps for an altar. Settlers in Jasper County in the 1850's found on top of it orderly piles

of sticks, and fragments of tobacco, pipes, and arrowheads.

Five years after the dragoons had crossed the territory, in January 1840, Congress created the county in 20 townships from territory formerly included in Keokuk and named it for Sergeant William Jasper, a fighter in the Revolutionary War.

By the treaty of October 11, 1842, the Sacs and Foxes agreed to move west of the "line running north and south from the painted or red rocks on the White Breast, on or before the first of May 1843," at which time that part of Jasper County east of the line was to be open for settlement. The White Breast referred to was the fork in the Des Moines River a short distance above the "red rock" in Marion County. The "line" very nearly divided Section 35, Township 78 North, Range 20 West, through the middle, approximately one mile west of the corporate limits of present day Monroe. More than three-fifths of Jasper County was therefore included in the new area to be opened for settlement.

Jasper County's first settlers -- Adam M. Tool, William Highland, John Frost, and John Vance -- started with a group of three others from Jefferson County April 23, 1843, walking for 80 miles along the south side of the Skunk river toward their future homesites. They carried provisions and blankets. A supply wagon was to follow. Three men dropped out along the way, but the four who persisted reached a point of timber now included in the corporate limits of Monroe and camped there the evening of April 27. But instead of stopping there, the party turned away the next morning in the direction of Oskaloosa where they hoped to stay with a squatter named Mosier.

Caught in the rain which drenched them as they picked their way over a rough Indian trail, they grew discouraged and talked of going back to Jefferson County to stay. Men encountered on the march had told him that the "New Purchase" could not be settled for 20 years. However, Highland persuaded Tool to return with him to the site of the April 27th encampment, while Frost and Vance, "suffering from aching feet as well as from acute nostalgia," were to stay on at Mosier's to await arrival of the supply wagon.

Highland and Tool were back at their destination on the evening of April 30 and camped there, awaiting the next day, when the area would be legally thrown open. "by the time the light of the sun had fully dissipated the shades of night, with tomahawk in hand, they began the work of blazing and staking their claims, Highland blazing and Tool driving the stakes." On the following day they surveyed claims for the other two men. By the morning of May 4, their provisions were exhausted and the hours dragged by until sundown brought a welcome sight -- the supply wagon driven by young James A. Tool, who was accompanied by Frost, Vance, and Washington Fleenor, Tool's son-in-law.

On May 5, James Tool and Fleenor each picked out a 160-acre claim east of the other four, with equal areas of prairie and timber apiece. Adam Tool, oldest of the party, had been allowed first choice, and had taken the westernmost claim. Highland had the middle, and after drawing lots for the other stakes, Vance won the claim between Tool and Highland. The remaining, easternmost site went to Frost.

Building cabins was the next work for, according to the law, each claim, to be valid, had to have a cabin on it before May 31. Highland's went up first, then the other five, "each one of the six being built up to the rafterplate in a single day, and later roofed and chinked."

About this time, during the third week of May 1843, more soldiers passed through the region -- Capt. J. R. B. Gardener and Company F, First United States Infantry, en route from Fort Crawford, Wisconsin for service at Fort Des Moines, Raccoon Forks. Military records fail to disclose any details of the trip.

Mrs. Willaim Highland, whose husband had returned to Jefferson County to bring her with him to their new home, had the honor of being the first white woman to come to Jasper County.

Tool meanwhile had left his family in Jefferson County, where 20 acres of corn and vegetables had been planted. In the fall, after these crops were gathered, Tool went to escort his wife and daughter back to the Jasper County site. Arriving September 2, 1843, the Tools found two usurpers living in their cabin -- two brothers, Benjamin and Jonas Castner, formerly of Missouri. The Castners were doubtful customers, of dubious occupation, but wishing to deal with them peacefully, Tool offered them \$15 to leave his cabin and move elsewhere. They accepted and marked out a nearby claim for themselves.

Soon the Tools built a new and larger house, a story-and-a-half high, with a puncheon floor. The original cabin had held the couple, their daughter and daughter-in-law, but James Tool and Washington Fleenor had had to sleep out in a wagon with a sheet over the bows for a roof.

The construction of Fort Des Moines brought a procession of workmen, pioneers, Indian agents, and traders following the wagon trail from Oskaloosa to Raccoon Forks. One of these travelers stopped at the Tool place and asked for food and lodging. Others followed suit and the larger house at Tool's Point, as the site came to be called, developed into an informal tavern.

Indians frequently visited the locality, too, for their first line of withdrawal was only a mile away. "For several months," says the History of Jasper County, "Mrs. Highland felt a little timorous when visited by her copper-colored neighbors in the absence of her husband. Often half a dozen

or more braves would call in a neighborly fashion for a talk, in which something to eat was not only acceptable, but usually hinted at. Of course, the clothing of her callers in winter was not very elaborate, and in summer was more sylvan still. At first she would try to cut short their visits, which they, well knowing the cause, would purposely prolong enjoying in their stolid way her annoyance and fear. When they had teased her to their satisfaction, they would offer to leave if she would shake hands with them. When she had complied with this small request they would depart in a moment as noiselessly as they had come."

William and Ellen Highland's son, Robert, whose birth took place in December 1843, was the first white child to be born in the county.

In February 1844, the area including Jasper and Marion Counties was attached to the newly organized Mahaska for election, revenue, and judicial purposes. Tool's house was the polling place for the county and local election held the first Monday in April 1844, and those elected were: William Highland, justice and clerk; Washington Fleenor, constable; and Adam Tool, trustee. In 1845 the Mahaska County commissioners set apart and designated the Jasper County territory as Washington Precinct. Tool's home was again the voting scene, and the ten or twelve voters are thought to have elected the same officials.

Complementing the seven claims made in 1843 by Tool's party and the Castners, only three are known to have been made in 1844 -- Manly Gifford, Section 36, Fairview Township; William "Tandy" Mayfield, about a mile west of what later became Lynnville; and Wesley Stallings, within the section where Lynnville is located.

An abundance of rain at Tool's Point in the summer of 1844 may have dampened the enthusiasm of prospective settlers. Parties hunting for bees and honey had to leave almost empty handed on account of the wetness of the season. Some horses were stolen from one of the groups and the Indians were blamed, but if he had been asked, Highland "might have told them that whoever stole their horses was probably more nearly white than red." In other words, the Castners.

That summer, too, romance flourished between Adam Tool's daughter Susan and Sergeant James Hill, who, stationed at Fort Des Moines, found it necessary to make frequent trips into Jasper County. These visits resulted in the marriage in February 1845 of Susan and the sergeant, with the Rev. Mr. Pardoe (probably of Marion County) officiating. For some obscure reason, social relations at Tool's Point seem to have been disturbed, and the highlands were not informed of or invited to the wedding.

Meanwhile the Tool home had been put to still another use. In the fall of 1844, \$40,000 in silver, en route from Agency City to Fort Des Moines, was deposited there overnight. It

was en route to the army post where it was to be paid to the Indians as annuities. Eager to dispatch the matter as quickly as possible, Major Beach, Indian agent, notified his charges to be ready to collect at once, or the currency would be returned to Agency City. But the Indians loved to parley, and they had much to talk about -- whether the money should go to heads of families or chiefs, or to agents and traders in payment of overdue bills. They refused to break off their council, which according to custom might last as long as a month, "the agent, meantime, being in a cold sweat with fear of being robbed."

Without wasting time, Beach sent the money back to Agency City, depositing it again overnight at Tool's Point. Then the Indians learning of the move and frightened at the prospect of losing it, made a hasty agreement and begged Beach to get the money once more for them. As before, it was left overnight at Tool's. Soon thereafter (for the fourth time) the settler's house served as "Tool's Bank Unincorporated," when a large part of the paid over sum was returned by request of the Indians to pay traders and agents in the country which they had recently vacated.

1997192

It was fortunate that no one attempted to steal the money, for there were some shady characters in the neighborhood who might have succeeded had they tried. Among these were two young men who put up a shanty not far from Tool's and proceeded to do business, their "outfit" consisting "mainly of a barrel of whiskey which, according to the custom among traders, was carefully diluted to one-third of its original strength." The couple drummed up a brisk trade among the Indians. But one day a band of Mesquakies, their thirst unsatisfied, went out for reinforcements and, returning in great numbers, forced their way back into the hut. In the ensuing melee, the white men suffered rough treatment, one having his cheek gashed with a saw. They escaped to Tool's Point and finding Mrs. Tool alone, tried to arouse her pity "but that worthy lady, who knew what their occupation had been, and having besides an innate dislike for whiskey and whiskey dealers, gave them but scanty commiseration. They did not resume business in this county, for their experience had fully satisfied them."

Another trader, Scott, who had located at Red Rock in 1843, remained only one season, for Indians were said to have stolen articles from his camp, and he had a fight with them while hunting south of Lynville. The red men developed a violent dislike for Scott who, they said, "had too much white in his eyes." An associate, Nichols, remained to continue the business for three years. He specialized in buying ponies, usually paying 16 quarts of whiskey for a first class animal.

An experienced frontiersman was Joab Bennett, who staked out a claim on the site of Newton in 1845. His fluent knowledge of the native language helped him to conclude quick and smart deals, for while other settlers haggled to pay ten or

fifteen dollars for choice animals, Bennett "would walk off with the bridle on his arm, having paid two or three dollars for the animal."

Among a number who took up claims in 1845 was a family named Smith, locating near Tool's Point. Having arrived only that summer, Smith succumbed to a brief illness in August and had the dubious honor of being the first white man to die in the county. The following October his son also fell ill and grew rapidly worse despite the attendance of a doctor from Pella. Finally he made his will and gave up the fight. He was buried in a coffin made of puncheons taken from the upper story of Tool's house.

A. T. Sparks, who with his family settled at Lynn Grove in 1845, commenced the construction of a sawmill, the first in the county, and completed it in the fall of 1846. This was a successful financial venture since lumber could not be obtained anywhere else for miles. Sparks, with an associate named Mills, built Jasper County's first flour mill in 1847, the first in a succession of water-powered mills on the North Skunk River. The first burrs of that first mill are now preserved in the Old Settlers' Park at Lynnville. The site had first been settled in 1844, when the original name "Lynn Grove" was suggested by a grove of basswood trees. Among other Jasper County settlers who staked out claims in 1845 were:

Ballinger, Aydellote.....	Newton
James Pearson.....	Newton Township
John H. Franklin.....	1½ miles NE of Newton
James Guthrie.....	between Newton and Colfax
John J. Mudgett.....	7 miles east of Monroe on Skunk River
M. T. Mathers.....	NW of Lynnville
John R. Sparks.....	Elk Creek Town- ship
Daniel Stephens.....	Elk Creek Town- ship
David Campbell.....	Near Lynnville
Blakely Shoemaker.....	Near Lynnville
Nathaniel J. Lattimore.....	Rock Creek Township
J. W. Swan.....	2 miles NE of Lynnville
William M. Springer.....	Midway between Newton and Rea- snor

Others were William B. Campbell, Mathias Campbell, Willis Green, William Howell, Moses Lacy, Joseph Kintz, James Maggert, David A. Maggers, Archibald McCollum, Daniel Moser,

(191) 100

Hugh Patterson, and Lemuel Perrin.

Among those settling in 1846 were: Ira Adamson, Alvin Adkins, James Edgar, Jesse Richman, and Nathan Williams, all near Newton; Martin Adkins, William Hanshaw, C. C. Thorpe, and John Q. Deakin, on the site of Vandalia; Evan Adamson, Section 17, Buena Vista Township; Henry Adamson, West of Murphy; Lewis Adamson, about a mile southeast of Lynnville; David Edmundson, about two miles southwest of Killduff; Elbert Evans, Mound Prairie Township; Nathaniel Hamlin, about one mile north of Murphy; Asher Pronty, a mile northwest of Vandalia; and David Shepherd, three miles northeast of Monroe.

Locations in which the following settlers were living in 1846 are not indicated; Abraham Adamson, James Blake, Milton Edwards, James Elliott, Andrew Shepherd, Hoseph Slaught-ter, Joseph Stoughboy, and John Thorp.

The Jasper County government was organized in April 1846 when J. R. Sparks, Manley Gifford, and Jacob Bennett were elected commissioners; J. H. Franklin, clerk; J. W. Swann, treasurer; David Edmundson, sherriff; Seth Hammer, recorder; and Washington Fleenor, probate judge. In July 1846 the commissioners selected a central location as county seat and named it Newton City in honor of Sergeant Newton. Newton like Sergeant Jasper, fought in the American Revolution. Judge Joseph Williams of Muscatine held the first term of court in a log building that had been erected as courthouse.

At this time, when Iowa had just become a State, the Legislature decided that a new capital more nearly central in location than Iowa City should be chosen.

8

